

WISHA REGIONAL DIRECTIVE

WISHA Services

Department of Labor and Industries

12.15 AUDIOMETRIC TESTING FOR INTERMITTENT NOISE EXPOSURE

Date: December 30, 1996

I. Background:

A question has been raised whether the requirement that employers subject to the Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act (WISHA) provide audiometric tests for employees overexposed to noise applies when employees are overexposed only on an intermittent basis for a limited time (*e.g.*, overexposure to noise is documented to occur 25 days in a year, as a result of employees performing a "noisy" job for a week or more at two or three different times throughout the year).

The Hearing Conservation Standard, WAC 296-62-09015 through 296-62-09055, requires employers to establish and maintain a mandatory audiometric testing program for all employees whose exposures equal or exceed an eight-hour time-weighted average (TWA) of 85 dBA. For employees overexposed to noise on the job, a baseline audiogram is required prior to or within 180 days after their first exposure to noise at or above the eight-hour TWA of 85 dBA (employers who use mobile test units are allowed up to one year to obtain a valid baseline audiogram). After obtaining a baseline audiogram, the employer is required to obtain a new audiogram at least annually for each employee exposed at or above the eight-hour TWA of 85 dBA.

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has previously issued guidance that clearly states that an employer's hearing conservation program (including the provision of audiograms) must include all employees who are exposed, either routinely or intermittently, to sound levels that exceed the 8-hour TWA (*i.e.*, OSHA TED 1.15, September 22, 1995).

II. Scope and Application:

This WISHA Regional Directive (WRD), which will remain in effect indefinitely, provides guidance to WISHA staff in applying the requirements of the Hearing Conservation Standard to intermittent noise exposure. This WRD incorporates the substance of WISHA Interim Interpretive Memorandum #96-6-G, which is hereby repealed.

III. Interpretive Guidance:

A. When must employees be included in the employer's hearing conservation program?

Compliance Safety and Health Officers (CSHOs) shall generally ensure that all employees who are overexposed to noise, whether routinely or intermittently, are included in the employer's hearing conservation program. This includes the provision of baseline and annual audiograms as specified in WAC 296-62-09027 of the Hearing Conservation Standard.

B. Should audiometric testing be required whenever a noise overexposure has been documented?

In the example brought up in the background section above (*e.g.*, overexposure to noise is documented to occur 25 days in a year, as a result of employees performing a “noisy” job for a week or more at two or three different times throughout the year) audiometric testing would be required. Where noise overexposures are documented to occur for only a very limited time (*e.g.*, workers who are only overexposed to noise a total of a week or less a year), the CSHO, in consultation with his or her supervisor, may choose not to issue a citation regarding the provision of audiograms after considering factors such as whether the employees were wearing appropriate hearing protection, were properly trained, and the extent to which the exposure limits were exceeded.

Frank P. Leuck, Assistant Director
Consultation and Compliance Services Division
Department of Labor and Industries
Post Office Box 44620
Olympia, Washington 98504-4620

POLICY & INTERPRETIVE STATEMENT SUBMITTAL FORM
Legislative and Governmental Affairs

Briefly state the subject matter of the Policy or Interpretive Statement:

This WISHA Regional Directive explains the application of existing audiometric testing requirements in the case of intermittent noise exposure.

CONTACT PERSON (for a copy of the Policy or Interpretive Statement):

Name Tracy Spencer
Address/MS 4620
Telephone 902-5530

PROGRAM CONTACT:

Name Gail Hughes
Address/MS 4630
Telephone 902-5439

Signature of Responsible Official (Assistant Director)

Date WRD, Policy or Interpretive Statement Issued: _____

<p>Please submit this form to the Legislative & Governmental Affairs Office at the end of each month, MS: 44001</p>

If you have any questions please contact
Marie Myerchin-Redifer in the Legislative and Governmental Affairs Office, 902-4205
